

Messages from the  
**Buddha**



# Buddha's Wisdom is as broad as the ocean and His Spirit is full of great Compassion.

This booklet describes the essences and parables of the Sutras that collect the true teachings of Buddha, the founder of Buddhism known as Shakyamuni, with simple expressions.

We sincerely hope that this booklet guides you in your encountering of the Buddha in daily life and provides you fresh answers to your problems.

\*Buddha means the awakened one.



This booklet was edited and excerpted from *The Teaching of Buddha*, published by BUKKYO DENDO KYOKAI.

## *The Messages from Buddha*

Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, reached enlightenment and attained the state of Buddhahood at 35 years of age. Before entering Nirvana at the age of 80, he gently preached his realization for 45 years through various forms that anyone can understand through one's ability and environment.

After he passed away, his disciples examined and assembled his teachings to pass them down to the next generation. This compilation developed as the canon or accepted collection of sutras.

The canon that has been passed down to the present does more than collect scraps of knowledge. It is the truth that was manifested through a human being's life experience. Therefore, the teachings of Buddha have become the spiritual support for many people by transcending both time and culture.

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## Introduction

There is a significant pledge called the “*Three Treasures*” that is recited by Buddhists all over the world:

*I take refuge in the Buddha  
I take refuge in the Dharma  
I take refuge in the Sangha*

### *Buddha:*

Shakyamuni is the historical figure of *Buddha*, however the heart of Buddha has been provided to us as the truth today. This inner heart is recalled by the Buddha statue which is the embodiment of the teachings of Buddha.

### *Dharma:*

The *Dharma* means the teaching that the Buddha taught. Its contents can be heard as your inner truth, which is recalled by the written teachings described in the sutras.

### *Sangha:*

The *Sangha* originally meant a group of disciples which assembled around Shakyamuni. This is the group of those who possess a beautiful heart and practice the truth based on the *Dharma* that *Buddha* taught.

To believe in the “Three Treasures” composed of Buddha, teachings and sacred friends is to let your narrow heart spread toward the vast world of truth which transcends all comprehension.

## **A Question of Life:** *The sufferings of the Young Prince*

The Shakya clansmen dwelt along the Rohini River which flows among the southern foothills of the Himalayas. Their king Shuddhodana Gautama established his capital at Kapilavastu and there had a great castle built and ruled wisely, winning the acclaim of his people.

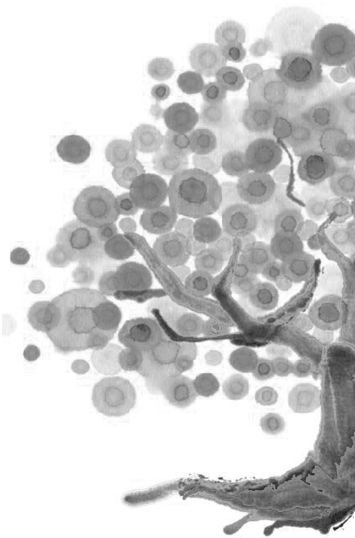
One night his Queen Maya had a strange dream in which she saw a white elephant entering into her womb through the right side of her chest and she became pregnant. According to their custom, the Queen returned to her parents' home for the birth, but on her way she took a rest in the Lumbini Garden and a prince was born. This memorable day was the eighth day of April. The joy of the King was great and he named the child Siddhartha, which means "Every wish fulfilled." However, delight was followed quickly by sorrow, for after several days Queen Maya suddenly died. Her younger sister, Mahaprajapati, became the child's foster mother and brought him up.

At the age of seven the Prince began his lessons in the civil and military arts, but his thoughts turned to other things. One spring day he went out of the castle with his father. They were watching a farmer at his plowing when he noticed a bird descend to the ground and carry off a small worm that had been turned up by the farmer's plough. He sat down in the shade of a tree and thought about it, whispering to himself, "Alas! Do all living creatures kill each other?" The Prince, who had lost his mother so soon after his birth, was

deeply affected by the tragedy of these little creatures. This spiritual wound deepened and became engrained in his mind day after day as he grew up. The King was increasingly worried as he tried in every possible way to cheer the Prince and to turn his thoughts in other directions. The King arranged the marriage of the Prince at the age of nineteen to the Princess Yashodhara.

For ten years, in the different Pavilions of Spring, Autumn and the Rainy Season, the Prince was immersed in rounds of music, dancing, and pleasure, but always his thoughts returned to the problem of suffering as he pensively tried to understand the true meaning of human life.

"The luxuries of the palace, this healthy body, this rejoicing youth! What do they mean to me?" he thought. "Someday we may be sick, we shall become aged; from death there is no escape." "A man struggling for existence will naturally look for something of value. There are two ways of looking — a right way and a wrong way. If he looks in the wrong way he recognizes that sickness, old age and death are unavoidable, but he seeks the opposite. "If he looks in the right way he recognizes the true na-





ture of sickness, old age and death, and he searches for meaning in that which transcends all human sufferings. In my life of pleasures I seem to be looking in the wrong way.”

Thus the spiritual struggle went on in the mind of the Prince. His child, Rahula, was born when he was twenty-nine. Then he decided to leave the palace and look for the solution of his spiritual unrest in the homeless life of a mendicant. However, his anguish did not end and many devils tempted him saying: “You would do better to return to the castle for the whole world would soon be yours.” But he told the devil that he did not want the whole world. So he shaved his head and turned his steps toward the south, carrying a begging

bowl in his hand. The Prince first visited the hermit Bhagava and watched his ascetic practices. He then went to Arada Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra to learn their practices, but he became convinced that they would not lead him to Enlightenment. Finally he went to the land of Magadha and practiced asceticism in the forest of Uruvilva on the banks of the Nairanjana River. The

methods of his practice were unbelievably rigorous. He spurred himself on with the thought that “no ascetic in the past, none in the present, and none in the future, ever has practiced or ever will practice more earnestly than I do.”

Still, the Prince could not realize his goal. After six years in the forest he gave up the practice of asceticism. He went bathing in the river and accepted a bowl of milk from the hand of Sujata to aid in a healthy recovery.

He was still weak, but at the risk of losing his life he attempted yet another period of meditation, saying to himself, “Blood may become exhausted, flesh may decay, bones may fall apart, but I will never leave this place until I find the way to Enlightenment.”

He was desperate and filled with confusing thoughts, dark shadows overhung his spirit, and he was beleaguered by all the lures of the devils. Carefully and patiently he examined them one by one and rejected them all. It was a hard struggle indeed, making his blood run thin, his flesh fall away, and his bones crack.

But when the morning star appeared in the eastern sky, the struggle was over and the Prince’s mind was as clear and bright as the breaking day. He had, at last, found the path to Enlightenment. It was December eighth when the Prince became a Buddha at thirty-five years of age.

*Various Scriptures, Sukhumālā-sutta, Ariyapariyesana-sutta*

## The Heart of Buddha

The Spirit of Buddha is that of great loving kindness and compassion. The great loving kindness is the spirit to save all people by any and all means. The great compassion is the spirit that prompts it to be ill with the illness of people, to suffer with their suffering.

“Your suffering is my suffering and your happiness is my happiness,” said Buddha, and, just as a mother always loves her child, He does not forget that spirit even for a single moment, for it is the nature of Buddhahood to be compassionate.

The Buddha’s spirit of compassion is stimulated according to the needs of the people; one’s faith is the reaction to this spirit, and it leads him to Enlightenment, just as a mother realizes her motherhood by loving her child; then the child, reacting to that love, feels safe and at ease.

Yet people do not understand this spirit of Buddha and go on suffering from the illusions and desires that arise from their ignorance; they suffer from their own deeds accumulated through worldly passions, and wander about among the mountains of delusion with the heavy burden of their evil deeds.

*Amitāyur-dhyāna-sūtra,  
Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra,  
Śūraṅgama-sūtra,  
Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*



## A Parable of the Burning House

It is very difficult for the words spoken by Buddha from the far bank of Enlightenment to reach the people still struggling in the world of delusion; therefore Buddha returns to this world Himself and uses His methods of salvation.

“Now I will tell you a parable,” Buddha said. “Once there lived a wealthy man whose house caught on fire. The man was away from home and when he came back, he found that his children were so absorbed in play that they had not noticed the fire and were still inside the house. The father screamed, ‘Get out, children! Come out of the house! Hurry!’ But the children did not heed him.

The anxious father shouted again. ‘Children, I have some wonderful toys here; come out of the house and get them!’ Heeding his cry this time, the children ran out of the burning house.”

This world is a burning house. The people, unaware that the house is on fire, are in danger of being burned to death so Buddha, in his compassion, devises ways of saving them.

*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*



慈悲 Compassion

Do not think that the compassion of the Buddha is only for the present life; it is a manifestation of the timeless compassion of the eternal Buddha that has been operative since unknown time, when mankind went astray due to ignorance.

The eternal Buddha always appears before people in the most friendly forms and brings to them the wisest methods of relief.

Shakyamuni Buddha, born a Prince among his Shakya kinsmen, left the comforts of his home to live a life of asceticism. Through the practice of silent meditation, he realized Enlightenment. He preached the Dharma (the teaching) among his fellow men and finally manifested it by his earthly death.

The working of Buddhahood is as everlasting as human ignorance is endless; and as the depth of ignorance is bottomless, so Buddha's compassion is boundless.

When Buddha decided to break from the worldly life, he made four great vows:

- 1) To save all people;
- 2) To renounce all worldly desires;
- 3) To learn all the teachings;
- 4) To attain perfect Enlightenment.

These vows were manifestations of the love and compassion that are fundamental to the nature of Buddhahood.



願 Vow

*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra,  
Mahāyāna-jātaka-cittabhūmiparīkṣa-sūtra*

When the moon sets, people say that the moon has disappeared; and when the moon rises, they say that the moon has appeared. In fact, the moon neither goes nor comes, but shines continually in the sky. Buddha is exactly like the moon: He neither appears nor disappears; He only seems to do so out of love for the people that He may teach them.



月 Moon

People call one phase of the moon a full moon and another phase a crescent moon; in reality, the moon is always perfectly round, neither waxing nor waning. Buddha is precisely like the moon. In the eyes of humans, Buddha may seem to change in appearance, but, in truth, Buddha does not change.

The moon appears everywhere, over a crowded city, a sleepy village, a mountain, a river. It is seen in the depths of a pond, in a jug of water, in a drop of dew hanging on a leaf. If a man walks hundreds of miles the moon goes with him. To men the moon seems to change, but the moon does not change. Buddha is like the moon following the people of this world in all their changing circumstances, manifesting various appearances, but in His Essence He does not change.

*Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*

For those who seek Enlightenment there are three ways of practice that must be understood and followed: first, disciplines for practical behavior; second, right concentration of mind; and third, wisdom.

What are disciplines? Everyone, whether a person is a common person or a way-seeker, should follow the precepts for good behavior. One should control both the mind and body, and guard the gates of one's five senses. One should be afraid of even a trifling evil and, from moment to moment, should endeavor to practice only good deeds.

What is meant by the concentration of mind? It means to quickly get away from greedy and evil desires as they arise and to hold the mind pure and tranquil.

What is wisdom? It is the ability to perfectly understand and to patiently accept the Fourfold Noble Truth, to know the fact of suffering and its nature; to know the source of suffering, to know what constitutes the end of suffering, and to know the Noble Path that leads to the end of suffering.

Those who earnestly follow these three ways of practice may rightly be called the disciples of Buddha.

*Aṅguttara Nikāya*



苦 Suffering



集 The Cause of Suffering



滅 The Extinction of Suffering



道 The Path to Nirvana

## Four Truths

The world is full of suffering. Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, sickness and death are sufferings. To meet a person whom one hates is suffering, to be separated from a beloved one is suffering, to be vainly struggling to satisfy one's needs is suffering. In fact, life that is not free from desire and passion is always involved with distress. This is called *the Truth of Suffering*.

The cause of human suffering is undoubtedly found in the thirsts of the physical body and in the illusions of worldly passion. If these thirsts and illusions are traced to their source, they are found to be rooted in the intense desires of physical instincts. Thus, desire, having a strong will-to-live as its basis, seeks that which feels desirable, even if it is sometimes death. This is called *the Truth of the Cause of Suffering*. If desire, which lies at the root of all human passion, can be removed, then passion will die out and all human suffering will be ended. This is called *the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering*.

In order to enter into a state where there is no desire and no suffering, one must follow a certain Path. This is called *the Truth of the Noble Path to the Cessation of the Cause of Suffering*.

People should keep these Four Truths clearly in mind.

*Vinaya, Mahāvagga,  
Sūṃyutta Nikāya, Dhammacakka-pavattana-sutta*



## Eight Right Paths

If one destroys the root of desire completely and becomes separated from attachments, human suffering will be erased. In order to enter into a state where there is no desire and no suffering, one must follow a certain Path called *Noble Eightfold Path*.

The stages of this *Noble Eightfold Path* are:

*Right View  
Right Thought  
Right Speech  
Right Behavior  
Right Livelihood  
Right Effort  
Right Mindfulness  
Right Concentration*



覺 Enlightenment

For the world is filled with suffering and if anyone wishes to escape from suffering, he must sever the ties of worldly passion which is the sole cause of suffering. The way of life which is free from all worldly passion and suffering can only be known through Enlightenment, and Enlightenment can only be attained through the discipline of the *Noble Eightfold Path*.

*Vinaya, Mahāvagga,  
Sūṃyutta Nikāya,  
Dhammacakka-pavattana-sutta*

There are causes for all human suffering, and there is a way by which they may be ended, because everything in the world is the result of a vast concurrence of causes and conditions, and everything disappears as these causes and conditions change and pass away.

Rain falls, winds blow, plants bloom, leaves mature and are blown away. These phenomena are all inter-related with causes and conditions, and are brought about by them, and disappear as the causes and conditions change.

One is born through the conditions of parentage. His body is nourished by food, his spirit is nurtured by teaching and experience.

Therefore, both flesh and spirit are related to conditions and are changed as conditions change.

As a net is made up by a series of knots, so everything in this world is connected by a series of knots. If anyone thinks that the mesh of a net is an independent, isolated thing, he is mistaken.

It is called a net because it is made up of a series of connected meshes, and each mesh has its place and responsibilities in relation to other meshes.

*Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda-sūtra*



Since everything in this world is brought about by causes and conditions, there can be no fundamental distinctions among things. The apparent distinctions exist because of people's absurd and discriminating thoughts.

In the sky there is no distinction of east and west; people create the distinctions out of their own minds and then believe them to be true.

Mathematical numbers from one to infinity are each complete numbers, and each in itself carries no distinction of quantity; but people make the discrimination for their own convenience, so as to be able to indicate varying amounts.

Inherently there are no distinctions between the process of life and the process of destruction; people make a discrimination and call one birth and the other death. In action there is no discrimination between right and wrong, but people make a distinction for their own convenience.

Buddha keeps away from these discriminations and looks upon the world as upon a passing cloud. To Buddha every definitive thing is illusion; He knows that whatever the mind grasps and throws away is insubstantial; thus He transcends the pitfalls of images and discriminative thought.

*Avatamsaka-sūtra*

*Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*



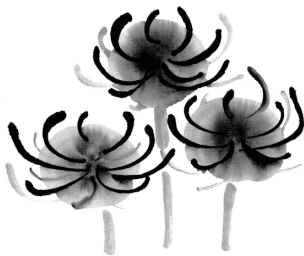
## View of the Middle Way

Suppose a log is floating in a river. If the log does not become grounded, or sink, or is not taken out by a man, or does not decay, ultimately it will reach the sea. Life is like this log caught in the current of a great river. If a person does not become attached to a life of self-indulgence, or, by renouncing life, does not become attached to a life of self-torture; if a person does not become proud of his virtues or does not become attached to his evil acts; if in his search for Enlightenment he does not become contemptuous of delusion, nor fear it, such a person is following the *Middle Way*.

The important thing in following the path to Enlightenment is to avoid being caught and entangled in any extreme, that is, always to follow the *Middle Way*.

*Dārukkhandha-sūtra*

*Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*



空 Emptiness

## Emptiness

This concept of universal oneness — that things in their essential nature have no distinguishing marks — is called “Sunyata.” Sunyata means non-substantiality, the un-born, having no self-nature, no duality. It is because things in themselves have no form or characteristics that we can speak of them as neither being born nor being destroyed. There is nothing about the essential nature of things that can be described in terms of discrimination; that is why things are called non-substantial. As has been pointed out, all things appear and disappear because of causes and conditions. Nothing ever exists entirely alone; everything is in relation to everything else. Wherever there is light, there is shadow; wherever there is length, there is shortness; wherever there is white, there is black. Just like these, as the self-nature of things cannot exist alone, they are called non-substantial. By the same reasoning, Enlightenment cannot exist apart from ignorance, nor ignorance apart from Enlightenment. Since things do not differ in their essential nature, there can be no duality.

*Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*

## The Form of Water

Behind the desires and worldly passions that the mind entertains, there abides, clear and undefiled, the fundamental and true essence of mind.

Water is round in a round receptacle and square in a square one, but water itself has no particular shape. People often forget this fact.

People see this good and that bad, they like this and dislike that, and they discriminate existence from non-existence; and then, being caught in these entanglements and becoming attached to them, they suffer.

If people would only give up their attachments to these imaginary and false discriminations, and restore the purity of their original minds, then both their mind and their body would be free from defilement and suffering; they would know the peacefulness that comes with that freedom.

*Śūraṅgama-sūtra*



心 Heart

## The Seed of Buddhahood

We have spoken of the pure and true mind as being fundamental; it is the *Buddha-nature*, that is, the seed of Buddhahood.

One can get fire if one holds a lens between the sun and moxa, but where does the fire come from? The lens is at an enormous distance from the sun, but the fire certainly appears upon the moxa by means of the lens. But if the moxa would not have the nature to kindle, there would be no fire.

In like manner, if the light of Buddha's Wisdom is concentrated upon the human mind, its true nature, which is Buddhahood, will be enkindled, and its light will illuminate the minds of the people with its brightness, and will awaken faith in Buddha. He holds the lens of Wisdom before all human minds and thus their faith may be quickened.

*Śūraṅgama-sūtra*



智慧 Wisdom

There are five things which no one is able to accomplish in this world,

first, to cease growing old when he is growing old;

second, to cease being sick;

third, to cease dying;

fourth, to deny extinction when there is extinction;

fifth, to deny exhaustion.

Ordinary people in the world sooner or later run into these facts, and most people suffer consequently, but those who have heard the Buddha's teaching do not suffer because they understand that these are unavoidable.

*Aṅguttara Nikāya*



Hatreds never cease by hatreds in this world. By love alone they cease. This is an ancient Law.

A fool who thinks that he is a fool is for that very reason a wise man. The fool who thinks that he is wise is called a fool indeed.

Though he should conquer a thousand men in the battlefield a thousand times, yet he, indeed, who would conquer himself is the noblest victor.

Though he should live a hundred years, not seeing the Truth Sublime; yet better, indeed, is the single day's life of one who sees the truth Sublime.

Hard is birth as man, Hard is the life of mortals, Hard is the hearing of the Sublime Truth, Hard is the appearance of a Buddha.

Not to do any evil, To cultivate good, To purify one's mind, – This is the advice of the Buddhas.

There are no sons for protection, neither father nor even kinsmen; for him who is overcome by death no protection is there from kinsmen.

\*The above sayings are from the Dhammapada, a collection of sayings of The Buddha in verse form and are some of the most widely read and best known of the Buddhist scriptures.

Once there was a boy named Sudhana who also wished for Enlightenment and earnestly sought the way. From a fisherman he learned the lore of the sea. From a doctor he learned compassion toward sick people in their suffering. From a wealthy man he learned that saving pennies was the secret of his fortune and thought how necessary it was to conserve every trifling gained on the path to Enlightenment.

From a meditating monk he learned that the pure and peaceful mind had a miraculous power to purify and tranquilize other minds. Once he met a woman of exceptional personality and was impressed by her benevolent spirit, and from her he learned a lesson that charity was the fruit of wisdom. Once he met an aged wanderer who told him that to reach a certain place he had to scale a mountain of swords and pass through a valley of fire. Thus Sudhana learned from his experiences that there was true teaching to be gained from everything he saw or heard.

He learned patience from a poor, crippled woman; he learned a lesson of simple happiness from watching children playing in the street; and from some gentle and humble people, who never thought of wanting anything that anybody else wanted, he learned the secret of living at peace with all the world.

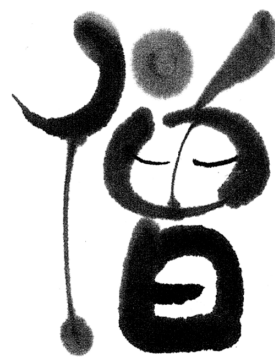
He learned a lesson of harmony from watching the blending of the elements of incense, and a lesson of thanksgiving from the arrangement of flowers. One day, passing through a forest, he took a rest under a noble tree and noticed a tiny seedling growing nearby

out of a fallen and decaying tree and it taught him a lesson of the uncertainty of life.

Sunlight by day and the twinkling stars by night constantly refreshed his spirit. Thus Sudhana profited by the experiences of his long journey.

Indeed, those who seek for Enlightenment must think of their minds as castles and decorate them. They must open wide the gates of their minds for Buddha, and respectfully and humbly invite Him to enter the inmost chamber, there to offer Him the fragrant incense of faith and the flowers of gratitude and gladness.

*Avatamsaka-sūtra*



僧 Sangha

## Nonexistent Poppy Seeds

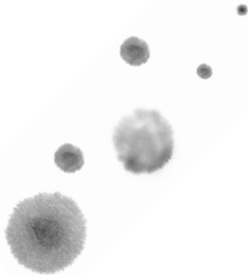
Once there was a young woman named Kisagotami, the wife of a wealthy man, who lost her mind because of the death of her child. She took the dead child in her arms and went from house to house begging people to heal the child.

Of course, they could do nothing for her, but finally a follower of Buddha advised her to see the Blessed One who was then staying at Jetavana, and so she carried the dead child to the Buddha.

The Blessed One looked upon her with sympathy and said: “To heal the child I need some poppy seeds; go and beg four or five poppy seeds from some home where death has never entered.”

So the demented woman went out and sought a house where death had never entered, but in vain. At last, she was obliged to return to Buddha. In his quiet presence her mind cleared and she understood the meaning of his words. She took the body away and buried it, and then returned to the Buddha and became one of his disciples.

*Therīgāthā Atthakathā*



## The Third Story without the Foundation <sup>Sangha</sup>

Once there was a wealthy but foolish man. When he saw the beautiful three-storied house of another man, he envied it and made up his mind to have one built just like it, thinking he was himself just as wealthy.

He called a carpenter and ordered him to build it. The carpenter consented and immediately began to construct the foundation, the first story, the second story, and then the third story. The wealthy man noticed this with irritation and said: — “I don’t want a foundation or a first story or a second story; I just want the beautiful third story. Build it quickly.”

A foolish man always thinks only of the results, and is impatient without the effort that is necessary to get good results. No good can be attained without proper effort, just as there can be no third story without the foundation and the first and the second stories.

*Upamā-śataka-sūtra*



## The Tail and the Head

At one time the tail and the head of a snake quarreled as to which should be the front.

The tail said to the head:— “You are always taking the lead; it is not fair, you ought to let me lead sometimes.” The head answered;— “It is the law of our nature that I should be the head; I cannot change places with you.”

But the quarrel went on and one day the tail fastened itself to a tree and thus prevented the head from proceeding. When the head became tired with the struggle the tail had its own way, with the result that the snake fell into a pit of fire and perished.

In the world of nature there always exists an appropriate order and everything has its own function. If this order is disturbed, the functioning is interrupted and the whole order will go to ruin.

*Samyuktaratnapīṭaka-sūtra*



## Kindness for the Bamboo



In a thicket at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains there once lived a parrot together with many other animals and birds. One day a fire started in the thicket from the friction of bamboos in a strong wind and the birds and animals were in frightened confusion.

The parrot, feeling compassion for their fright and suffering, and wishing to repay the kindness he had received in the bamboo thicket where he could shelter himself, tried to do all he could to save them. He dipped himself in a pond nearby and flew over the fire and shook off the drops of water to extinguish the fire. He repeated this diligently with a heart of compassion out of gratitude to the thicket.



This spirit of kindness and self-sacrifice was noticed by a heavenly god who came down from the sky and said to the parrot: — “You have a gallant mind, but what good do you expect to accomplish by a few drops of water against this great fire?” The parrot answered: — “There is nothing that cannot be accomplished by the spirit of gratitude and self-sacrifice. I will try over and over again and then over in the next life.”

The great god was impressed by the parrot’s spirit and together they extinguished the fire.

*Samyuktaratnapīṭaka-sūtra*



Suppose a man goes to the forest to get some of the pith that grows in the center of a tree and returns with a burden of branches and leaves thinking that he has secured what he went after. Would he not be foolish if he is satisfied with the bark instead of the wood for the pith which he was after? But that is what many people are doing.

A person seeks a path that will lead him away from birth, old age, sickness, and death, or from misery, sorrow, suffering and agony. And yet, he follows the path a little ways, notices a little advancement, and immediately becomes proud and conceited and domineering. He is like the man who sought pith and went away satisfied with a burden of branches and leaves.

Another man becoming satisfied with the progress he has made by a little effort, relaxes his effort and becomes proud and conceited; he is carrying away only a load of branches instead of the pith he was seeking.

Still another man finding that his mind is becoming calmer and his thoughts clearer, he, too, relaxes his effort and becomes proud and conceited; he has a burden of the bark instead of the pith he was looking for.

Those who seek the true path to Enlightenment must not expect any offer of respect, honor, or devotion. First of all, one should keep clearly in mind the basic and essential nature of this world of life and death.

*Majjhima Nikāya, Mahāsāropama-sutta*



The Perfection of Six Practices for reaching the other shore of Enlightenment are: the path of Offering, the path of Keeping Precepts, the path of Endurance, the path of Endeavor, the path of Concentration of mind, and the path of Wisdom. By following these paths, one can surely pass from the shore of delusion over to the shore of Enlightenment.

The practice of Offering gets rid of selfishness; the practice of Precepts keeps one thoughtful of the rights and comforts of others; the practice of Endurance helps one to control a fearful or angry mind; the practice of Endeavor helps one to be diligent and faithful; the practice of Concentration helps one to control a wandering and futile mind; and the practice of Wisdom changes a dark and confused mind into a clear and penetrating insight.

Offering and Keeping Precepts make the foundation necessary to build a great castle on. Endurance and Endeavor are the walls of the castle that protect it against enemies from outside. Concentration and Wisdom are the personal armor that protects one against the assaults of life and death.

Neither is it a True Offering if after the act there are feelings of regret or of self-praise; a True Offering is one that is given with pleasure, forgetting oneself as the giver, the one who receives it and the gift itself.

True Offering springs spontaneously from one's pure compassionate heart with no thought of any return, wishing to enter into a life of Enlightenment together.

*Avatamsaka-sūtra, Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*

## The Seven Kinds of Offering

There are seven kinds of offering which can be practiced by even those who are not wealthy.

The first is physical offering. This is to offer service by one's labor. The highest type of this offering is to offer one's own life.

The second is spiritual offering. This is to offer a compassionate heart to others.

The third is the offering of eyes. This is to offer a warm glance to others which will give them tranquility.

The fourth is the offering of countenance. This is to offer a soft countenance with a smile to others.

The fifth is the oral offering. This is to offer kind and warm words to others.

The sixth is the offering of a seat. This is to offer one's seat to others.

The seventh is the offering of shelter. This is to let others spend the night at one's home.

These kinds of offering can be practiced by anyone in everyday life.

*Saṃyuktaratnapīṭaka-sūtra*

## Neither Too Tight nor Too Loose

There was a young man named Srona who was born in a wealthy family but was of delicate health. He was very earnest to gain Enlightenment and became a disciple of the Blessed One. On the path to Enlightenment, he tried so hard that finally his feet bled.

The Blessed One pitied him and said, “Srona my boy, did you ever study the harp at your home? You know that a harp does not make music if the strings are stretched too tight or too loose. It makes music only when the strings are stretched just right.

The training for Enlightenment is just like adjusting the harp strings. You cannot attain Enlightenment if you stretch the strings of your mind too loosely or too tightly. You must be considerate and act wisely.”

Srona found these words very profitable and finally gained what he sought.

*Theragāthā Aṭṭhakathā*



## *Make of Yourself a Light: Rely upon Yourself*

Beneath the sala trees at Kusinagara, in his last words to his disciples, the Buddha said:

“Make of yourself a light. Rely upon yourself: do not depend upon anyone else. Make my teachings your light. Rely upon them: do not depend upon any other teaching.

Consider your body: think of its impurity. Knowing that both its pain and its delight are alike causes of suffering, how can you indulge in its desires? Consider your ‘self’: think of its transiency; how can you fall into delusion about it and cherish pride and selfishness, knowing that they must all end in inevitable suffering? Consider all substances: can you find among them any enduring ‘self’? Are they not all aggregates that sooner or later will break apart and be scattered? Do not be confused by the universality of suffering, but follow my teaching, even after my death, and you will be rid of pain. Do this and you will indeed be my disciples.”

“My disciples, the teachings that I have given you are never to be forgotten or abandoned. They are always to be treasured, they are to be thought about, they are to be practiced. If you follow these teachings you will always be happy.

The point of the teachings is to control your own mind. Keep your mind from greed, and you will keep your behavior right, your mind pure and your words faithful. By always thinking about the transiency of your life, you will be able to resist greed and anger, and will be able to avoid all evils.

If you find your mind tempted and so entangled in greed, you must suppress and control the temptation; be the master of your own mind.

A man’s mind may make him a Buddha, or it may

make him a beast. Misled by error, one becomes a demon; enlightened, one becomes a Buddha. Therefore, control your mind and do not let it deviate from the right path.”

“You should respect each other, follow my teachings, and refrain from disputes; you should not, like water and oil, repel each other, but should, like milk and water, mingle together.

Study together, learn together, practice my teachings together. Do not waste your mind and time in idleness and quarreling. Enjoy the blossoms of Enlightenment in their season and harvest the fruit of the right path.

The teachings which I have given you, I gained by following the path myself. You should follow these teachings and conform to their spirit on every occasion.

If you neglect them, it means that you have never really met me. It means that you are far from me, even if you are actually with me; but if you accept and practice my teachings, then you are very near to me, even though you are far away.”

“My disciples, my end is approaching, our parting is near, but do not lament. Life is ever changing; none can escape the dissolution of the body. This I am now to show by my own death, my body falling apart like a dilapidated cart.

Do not vainly lament, but realize that nothing is permanent and learn from it the emptiness of human life. Do not cherish the unworthy desire that the changeable might become unchanging.

The demon of worldly desires is always seeking chanc-



灯明 Votive Light

es to deceive the mind. If a viper lives in your room and you wish to have a peaceful sleep, you must first chase it out.

You must break the bonds of worldly passions and drive them away as you would a viper. You must positively protect your own mind.”

“My disciples, my last moment has come, but do not forget that death is only the end of the physical body. The body was born from parents and was nourished by food; just as inevitable are sickness and death.

But the true Buddha is not a human body: — it is Enlightenment. A human body must die, but the Wisdom of Enlightenment will exist forever in the truth of the Dharma, and in the practice of the Dharma. He who sees merely my body does not truly see me. Only he who accepts my teaching truly sees me.

After my death, the Dharma shall be your teacher. Follow the Dharma and you will be true to me.

During the last forty-five years of my life, I have withheld nothing from my teachings. There is no secret teaching, no hidden meaning; everything has been taught openly and clearly. My dear disciples, this is the end. In a moment, I shall be passing into Nirvana. This is my instruction.”

*Dīrgh Nikāya, Parinibbāna-sutta, Mahāparinibbana-sutta*

### *Nirvāṇa* (Perfect Tranquility):

Literally, it means “to blow out.” This is the state where all human defilement and passion have been completely extinguished through certain practices and meditation based upon Right Wisdom. Those who had attained this state are called Buddhas. Gautama Siddhartha had attained this state and became a Buddha at thirty-five.

## *Buddhist Denominations in Japan*

Buddhism began with the teachings of Gautama Siddhartha, Buddha Shakyamuni, in India about 2,500 years ago. The religion initially entered Japan in the mid-6th century A.D. through Central Asia, via China and Korea. Over a period of approximately 1,400 years, several denominations and schools were introduced from China, and a variety of others were established by Japanese priests.

### *Nara Period (710-794)*

Buddhism first entered Japan in 538 A.D. It seems that during this early period, up until the beginning of the Nara period, there was a minimal amount of sectarian activity. A great Buddhist patron of this period was Prince Regent Shōtoku (574-622), who employed Buddhism as a basic guideline in his administration. He is known as the author of the Imperial Proclamation in which he urged the people to revere the Three Treasures of Buddhism, namely the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṃgha. The proclamation was issued in 594. The Constitution of 17 Articles, the nation's first constitution, promulgated by the prince in 604, is also based on Buddhist teachings.

During the Nara period, six schools were introduced from China. They were called “Nanto-riku-shū” or the six schools of the southern capital (Nara). These six schools, Hosso denomination, Sanron denomination, Kegon denomination, Jōjitsu denomination, Ritsu denomination, and Kusha denomination, placed emphasis on academics, which was to characterize the various denominations that later appeared. As they had interrelated fields of study, the six schools were not completely independent of each other. Monks and priests were not bound to any one school, but were able to freely study the doctrines of all six schools.

## *Heian Period (794-1192)*

During the Heian period, which lasted about 400 years, mainstream Japanese Buddhism centered around two famous priests. They were Saichō (767-822), generally known by his posthumous name, Dengyō Daishi (Daishi is an Imperial title, meaning “Great Teacher”), who established the Tendai denomination, and Kūkai (774-835), known as Kōbō Daishi, who founded the Shingon denomination. In the early part of this period, they founded the first two separate Japanese denominations in the new capital of Kyoto.

## *Kamakura Period (1192-1333)*

In the Kamakura Period, as the result of Mappō or “latter day” concept in Buddhism, three main schools of Japanese Buddhism emerged. They were the Pure Land Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, and the Nichiren denomination.

Both the Jōdo denomination, founded by Hōnen (Genkū: 1133-1212) and the Yūzū-nembutsu denomination, which became independent towards the end of the Heian Period, founded by Ryōnin (1072-1132), are based on the Jōdo (Pure Land) teachings.

Other denominations based on Pure Land teachings which were established in this period include the Ji denomination founded by Ippen (Chishin: 1239-1289) and the Jōdo-shin denomination founded by Shinran (1173-1262). The Zen denominations which originated in this period were the Rinzai denomination, based on the teachings brought from China by Eisai (1141-1215) and the Sōtō denomination taught by Dōgen (1200-1253).

The Nichiren denomination was founded by Nichiren (1222-1282). In the beginning of the Edo Period, Yin-yuan (1592-1673), a Chinese monk, brought from China the Ōbaku denomination, which is also based on Zen teachings.